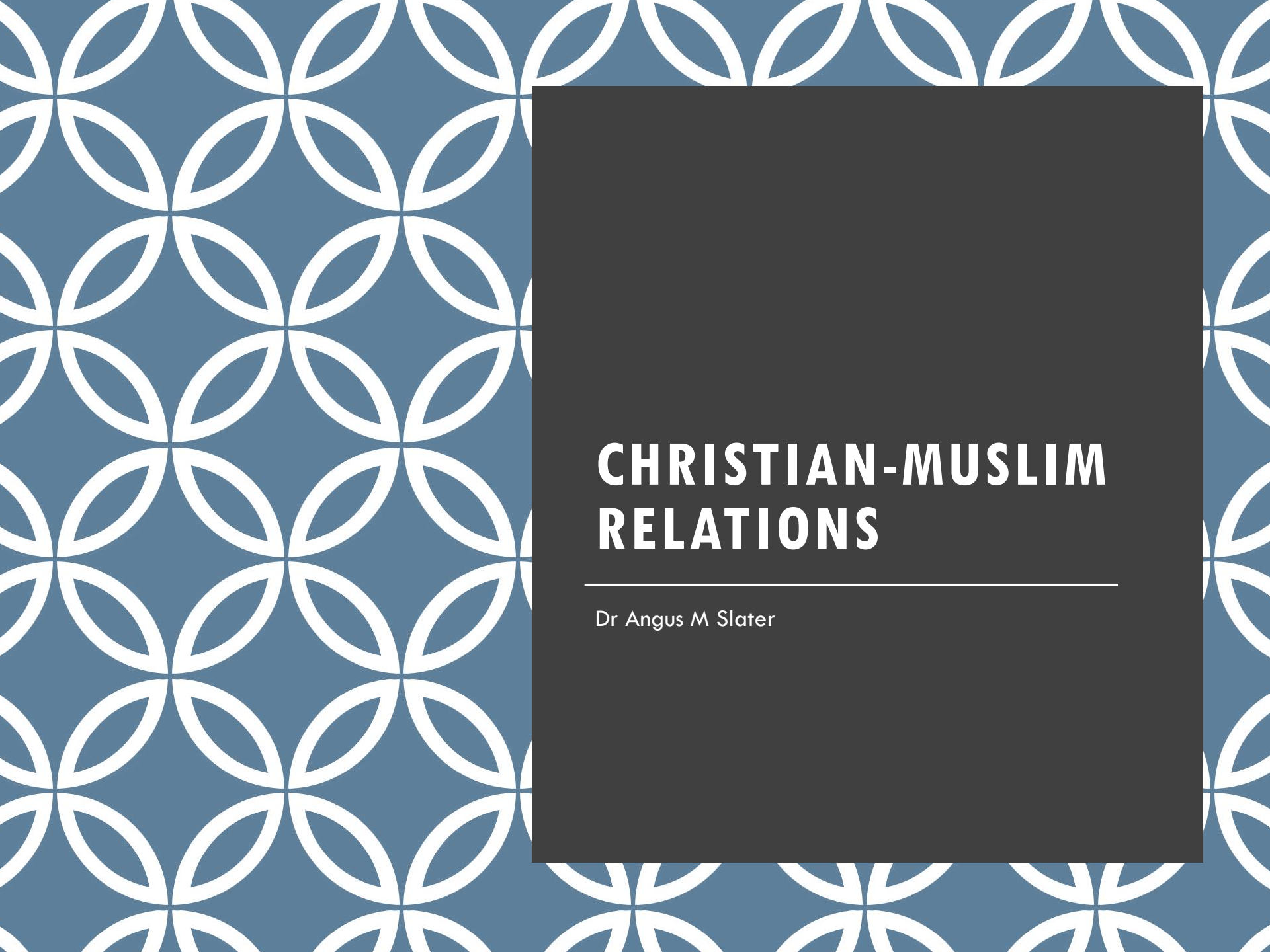




CHRISTIAN-MUSLIM RELATIONS

Dr Angus M Slater

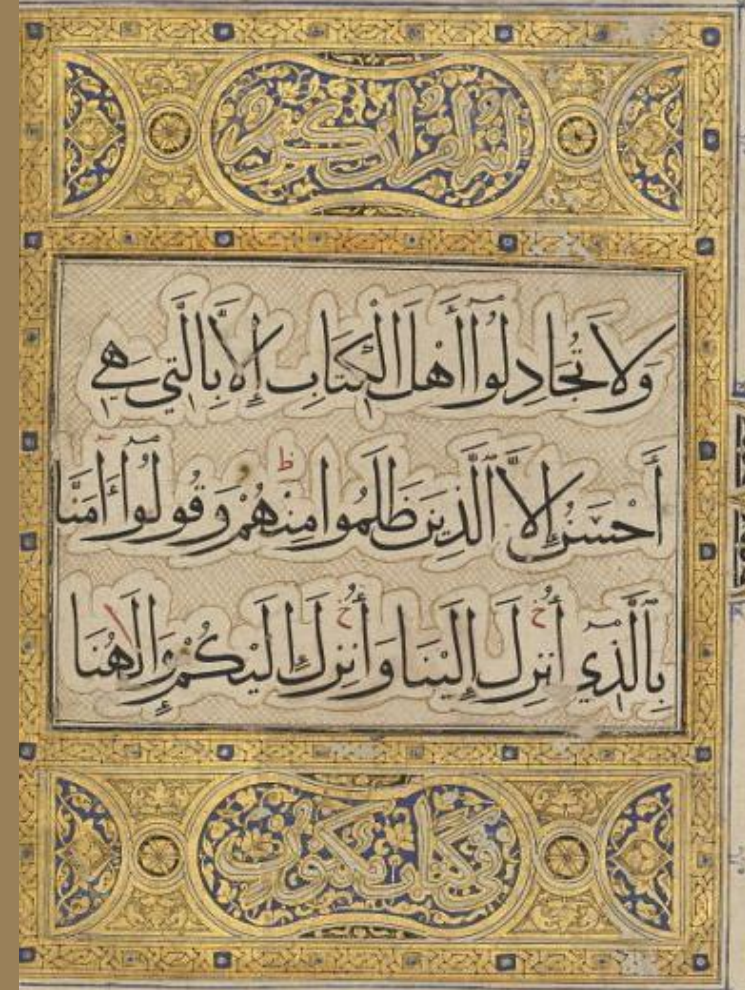
REVISION

In the previous section, we examined a fundamental difference in theology between the Christian and Islamic traditions.

This difference is over the nature of the divine, specifically between the trinitarian conception present within the Christian tradition and the starker monotheism of the Islamic faith. Both share facets – a commitment to monotheism – but differ on the meaning and structure of this commitment.

This specific area of similarity / dis-similarity is particularly important because it permeates a great deal of the theological relationship evident between them, forming the foundational dislocation of theology that informs further discussion of scripture or shared figures.

In addition, it is a useful example of the process of differentiation and assimilation that occurs between religious traditions which emerge at different historical periods and in different geographical areas – the desire to be seen as connected to, but distinct from, other competing traditions in the cultural and social milieu.

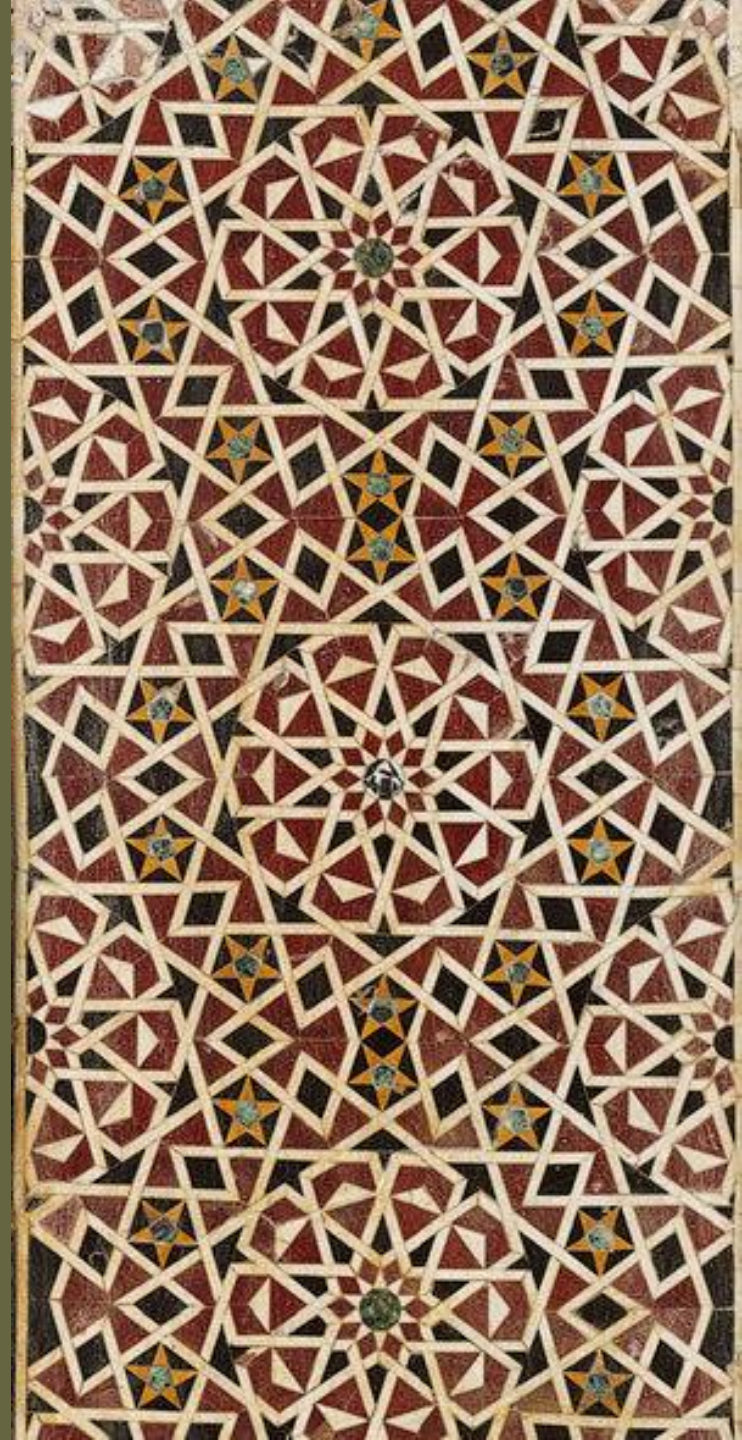


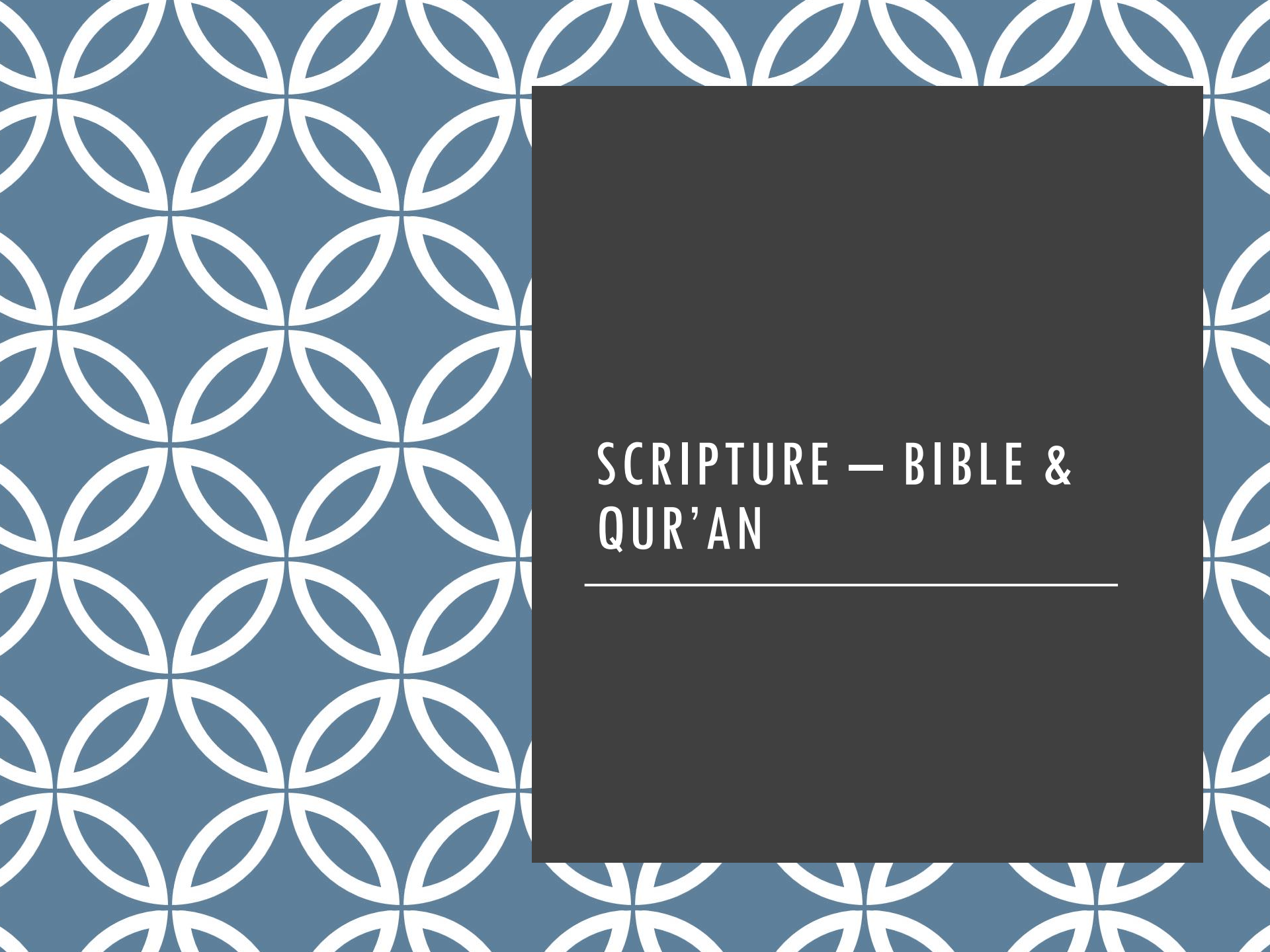
REVISION

In the previous section, you had four readings to complete which offered further detail and exploration of this area of similarity and dissimilarity between the traditions.

The first two readings aimed to locate and explain the importance of the concepts of the Trinity and Tawhid within their religious traditions, providing further groundwork for your understanding of these concepts and their general importance.

The third and fourth readings aimed to show the elements of conversation that had moved into fruitful discussion between and about these differing concepts. Both Kuhn and Beaumont attempt to understand the differing position of the other through the lens of their own traditions, offering interesting interactions and potentialities between them.





SCRIPTURE — BIBLE & QUR'AN

SCRIPTURE — BIBLE & QUR'AN

In this section, we move on from tracing the historical trends in the relationship between the traditions of Christianity and Islam, and turn our attention to the theological and religious differences that often shape and form the nature of that relationship.

We have already seen in the previous sections, that belief, either where it is the same or where it differs, can have a huge influence on the nature of interaction between communities which subscribe to them, and, in turn, that changes in community relations can cause changes in that way that shared beliefs are read and understood.

It is not possible to separate the two out — to have history float free of theology, or theology to inhabit some rarefied space beyond historical interactions. Both aspects of faith are an integral part of the motivations that drive communities or individuals to do the things they do.

It is with this in mind that we turn in this section to theological differences, beginning with perhaps the most significant and least understood — the nature of God.

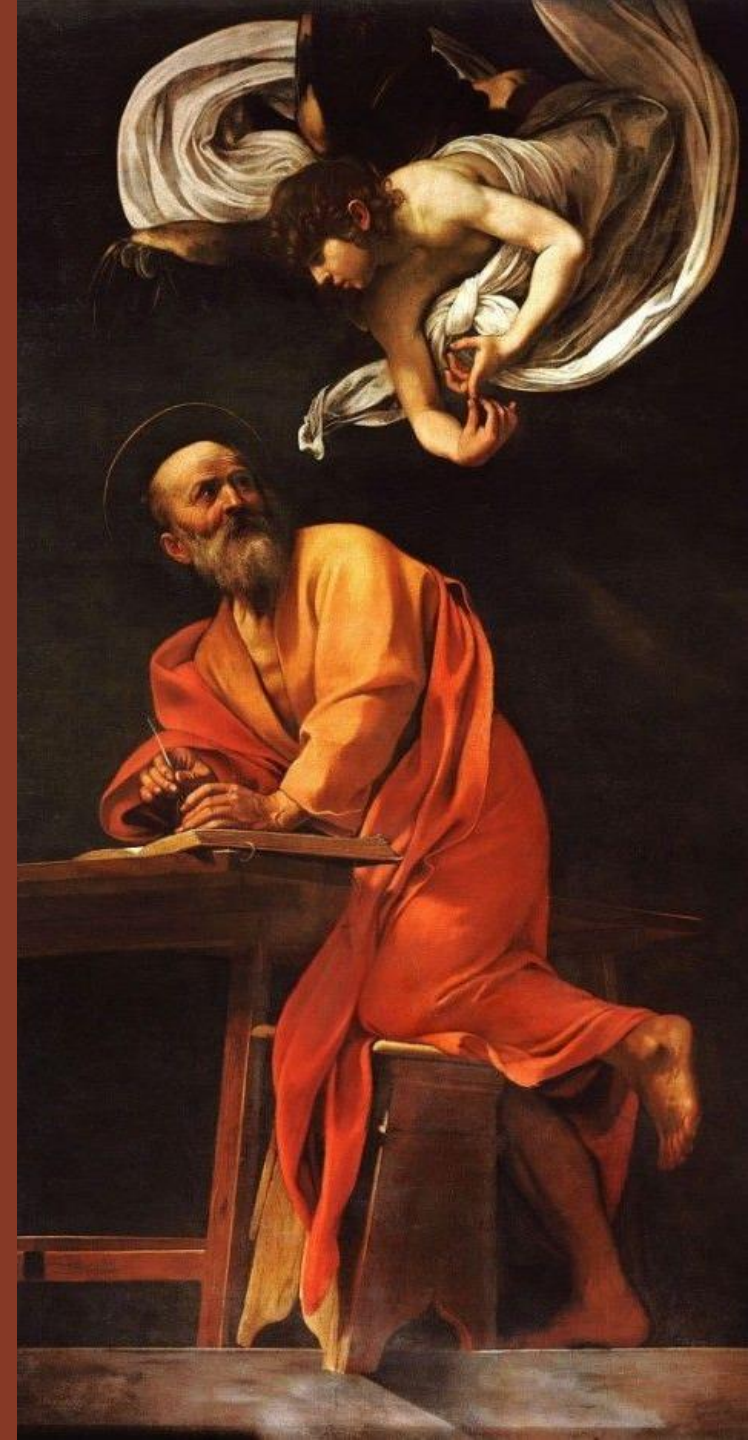
SCRIPTURE

SCRIPTURE

We begin this section by examining what we mean when we say 'scripture' and how this word may function differently within the Christian and Islamic religious traditions.

Scripture is one of those terms that we feel we know what we mean when we use it, but generally, we do not interrogate the exact bounds and boundaries of it too closely.

Beyond these factors, we must also examine the differing roles that these scriptures play in each tradition, the different conceptions of their uses, and, of course, what they might say about each other.



SCRIPTURE

The term scripture emerges within the Western context from the Latin verb *scribere*, to write.

Likely drawing its root from the proto-indo-European **skribh-*, meaning to cut, separate, or sift, and applied to the practice of cutting into materials in order to write, over time the term becomes associated with multiple forms of writing.

These include referring to a piece of writing (usually religious), the act of writing itself, and the written characters themselves.

Gradually we see a distinction drawn between Scripture, referring to specific religious writings found within an established canon, and scripture, the more commonplace use of the term for the act of writing itself.

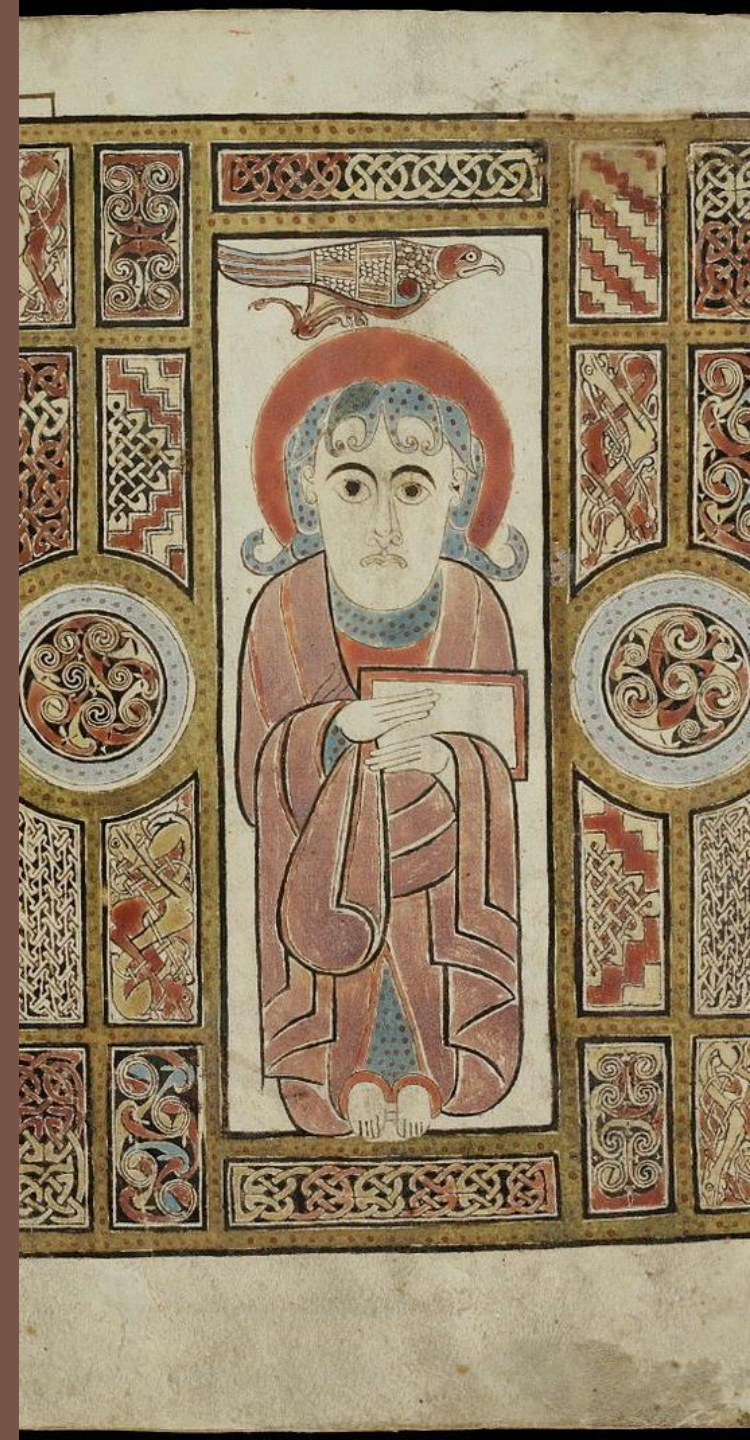


SCRIPTURE

Of course, what counts as a piece of scripture (taken here to mean as religious important text, a repository of meaning or guidance, perhaps the record of a form of revelation) is a complicated and historically situated question.

Within the Christian tradition, we see the development of the established canon of the Bible emerge through Marcion (140AD), various Church Councils (Rome 332AD & Carthage 397AD), and Athanasius (367AD), resulting in the 73 / 66 book canon we are familiar with today.

Exactly what the meaning of these books is varies across the Christian tradition, from wise writings with little historical truth, to the literal and eternal word of God. This makes generalisation about the ways Christians view and relate to the Bible difficult to answer — for some it is the central spoke around which faith and practice revolve, for others it is a hokey tome of unacceptable ethical examples.



SCRIPTURE

Contrastingly, the development of the 'canon' of scripture in Islam is pratty clear – stemming from the recitation of direct revelation to the Prophet Muhammad, its codification and writing down in the decades following, and the codification of its text under the third Caliph Uthman (644-655AD).

While there are scholars who posit a later or earlier date for the codification and uncover textual changes, general opinion supports an early date for the codification of the text and the solidity of it over time.

The areas of complication within the Islamic tradition arise in different areas to those experienced within the Christian tradition – matters of the Sunnah and Hadith, the nature of revelation, and its historical and cultural particularity.





لواخترت لكم لادب من امرائكم من عبيدكم واسلوا كثيرا ولواخترت الماء كافوا على خطير عظيم من الفرق في حيث اخترت اللبن سوف
تجزياتك الهضبة والضراط المستقيم فلما سرت ساعة قال لي جبريل انزل يا رسول الله وصل ركعتين فركعت وصليت قال هذه
يبنى به المدينة التي يكون هجرتك اليها فركبت وسرت زمانا ثم قال لي انزل يا محمد وصل ركعتين فركعت وصليت فقال هذا طور سينا الذي
كلم الله تعالى عليه موسى بن عمران عليه السلام فركبت ثم سرت هينة فقال لي انزل يا محمد وصل ركعتين فركعت وصليت فقال هذا مقلد
عليه السلام لم يركب وسرت الى بيت المقدس فلما انتهيت الى باب المسجد الاقصى نزلت عن البراق فاخذ جبريل البراق وشده في حلقة الباب
في المكان الذي شدي فيه الانبياء قبلي فدخلت المسجد فاذا انا بالانبياء رءوسهم نحو اهلان فلما راوتني سلموا علي فسلمت من اهل جبريل من هؤلاء
فقالوا لعلك الانبياء الذين سبقوك فاصطفوا للصلاة فقال جبريل عليه السلام تقدم وصل بهم فقد مث وسلمت عليهم وصليت بهم ركعتين
ثم انطلقت الى الصخرة وهذه الصخرة هي التي تخرج الملائكة عندها والانبياء الى المعراج والسماء من عندها فخرجت ايضا من هناك الى السماء

Of course, within the Islamic tradition, there is a great deal of material from outside the text of the Qur'an which is seen as religiously valuable and a source of moral edification – for example, the Sunnah, the example of the Prophets actions, and the Hadith, the reported sayings of the Prophet.

In each case, these sources operate as a form of scripture, but with different levels of reliability, relevance, and importance for believers. They form the bedrock for much of the ethical and moral development of the Islamic tradition, providing further flesh to the epistemologically secure and reliable Qur'an.

The need for this further fleshing out emerges from the historically, culturally, and geographically bounded nature of the prophetic revelation – the Qur'anic revelation, in comparison to the Christian scriptural canon, is short, relatively genre specific, and largely deals with specific issues.

The epistemological and ethical valuation of the text as divine necessitates an expansion of its contextual relevance through the alternate (but subsidiary) ethical sources.

SCRIPTURE

For no prophecy was ever
produced by the will of man,
but men spoke from God as
they were carried along by the
Holy Spirit”

2 Peter 1:21

SCRIPTURE

The differing nature and origin of Scripture is perhaps the clearest area of difference between the two religious traditions here.

For Christians, the text of the Bible emerges from the inspiration of God, but is not itself directly from God. Even the most literalist of Christians would edge away from saying that the words on the page of scripture are the direct words of the divine.

In contrast, the Qur'an is believed to be the direct word of Allah – transmitted and recited without error by the Prophet Muhammad, reflecting in some way an eternal reality.

This difference causes significant variances in the way that scripture is approached in both traditions – the valuation of the text; its interpretation and contextualisation; the need for interpretative processes; and the continuing direct relevance of the direct text to ethical actions on the part of the believer.

First Verses of Quran

أَقْرَأْ بِاسْمِ رَبِّكَ الَّذِي خَلَقَ ﴿١﴾ خَلَقَ الْإِنْسَانَ مِنْ عَلَقٍ ﴿٢﴾ أَقْرَأْ وَرَبُّكَ الْأَكْرَمُ ﴿٣﴾

الَّذِي عَلَّمَ بِالْقَلَمِ ﴿٤﴾ عَلَّمَ الْإِنْسَانَ مَا لَمْ يَعْلَمْ ﴿٥﴾

Read [O Muhammad!] in the name of your Lord who created. (96.1) He created man from a clot. (96.2) Read, and your Lord is the Most Honorable (96.3) who taught with the pen, (96.4) taught man what he did not know. (96.5)

SCRIPTURE

Christian and Islamic attitudes towards scripture, their understanding of what counts as scripture, and the role that it plays in the development of the traditions fundamentally and significantly differ – the differing nature of scripture is not only a question of differing attitudes to words on a page, but also causes a spiraling of differential approaches in matters of epistemology (where truth can be found), hermeneutics (how truth can be extracted from the text), ethics (how the truth can impact our behaviour), and aesthetics (how the truth illuminates the beauty of things).

For this reason, while we often assume that Christian and Islam share both monotheism and scripturalism in common, the difference between them is distinct and expansive, and requires careful exposition in order to fully understand.



MUSLIMS ON THE BIBLE

MUSLIMS ON THE BIBLE

Reflecting the nature of the Christian scriptures, there is no single term for the 'Bible' used in the Qur'an in the same fashion as it is used by Christians to describe the 73/66 books of scripture.

Instead, the Qur'an commonly refers to the different books of the Bible separately - for example, *Tawrat* to refer to the five books of Moses, *Zabur* to refer to the Book of Psalms attributed to David, and *Injil* to refer to the Gospel of Jesus.

In each case there is a distinction drawn between the original form of the writing, revealed by God to the prophets, and the corrupted or changed form used by the different religious groups associated with them whether Jews or Christians. As Al-Tabari, a Qur'anic commentator, wrote the *Tawrat* is better thought of as 'the Torah that they possess today' (Adang, 1996, p.231).

I want to take each of these references in turn, before looking at two places where the Islamic tradition has traditionally seen a pre-figuring of the Qur'an and Muhammad in the text of the Bible.

MUSLIMS ON THE BIBLE

The mentions of the *Tawrat* in the Qur'an are uniformly positive, with its delivery from God to Moses for the Jewish people central to its role. This can be seen in Qur'an 5:44, which partly states:

“Indeed, We sent down the Torah, in which was guidance and light. The prophets who submitted [to Allah] judged by it for the Jews, as did the rabbis and scholars by that with which they were entrusted of the Scripture of Allah, and they were witnesses thereto”

In addition, the rules contained within the *Tawrat* are described by the Qur'an, referred to as prophesying Muhammad, and as offering a direct revelation from Allah to Moses. An example of this is 5:45, which references the *Tawrat* in a way that show familiarity with its contents:

“And We prescribed for them therein: The life for the life, and the eye for the eye, and the nose for the nose, and the ear for the ear, and the tooth for the tooth, and for wounds retaliation. But whoso forgoeth it (in the way of charity) it shall be expiation for him. Whoso judgeth not by that which Allah hath revealed: such are wrong-doers.”

MUSLIMS ON THE BIBLE

Similarly, the Qur'an refers to the delivery of the Book of Psalms or *Zabur* to David, counting it among other forms of scripture as a guide for the people of Israel. This can be clearly seen in the lineage of prophecy delineated in 4:163:

“Lo! We inspire thee as We inspired Noah and the prophets after him, as We inspired Abraham and Ishmael and Isaac and Jacob and the tribes, and Jesus and Job and Jonah and Aaron and Solomon, and as We imparted unto David the Psalms”,

tying these earlier forms of scripture to the later Qur'anic revelation.

There is also a suggestion, in 17:55, that the Psalms occupy a slightly different place within this lineage – perhaps related to the very different genre they occupy, which the Christian tradition has also struggled to engage with:

“And thy Lord is Best Aware of all who are in the heavens and the earth. And we preferred some of the prophets above others, and unto David We gave the Psalms”

MUSLIMS ON THE BIBLE

Beyond these two areas of overlap, Muslim attitudes towards the Gospels are an important and difficult area of Christian-Muslim relations given their centrality to Christian practice.

The most important aspect of difference is the distinction in the Islamic tradition between the Gospel given to Jesus, by the divine, for his teaching and the various gospels revered by Christians today. For the Islamic tradition, these are not the same thing, with the Christian gospel accounts being corrupted and written by others.

This means that use of the term *Injil* (stemming from the Greek *Evangelion*) in Arabic refers to the book / revelations made by Allah to Isa, and there is significant resistant to identifying this with the Christian Gospels.

An example of this understanding can be found in the Qur'an 57:27:

“Then We caused Our messengers to follow in their footsteps; and We caused Jesus, son of Mary, to follow, and gave him the Gospel, and placed compassion and mercy in the hearts of those who followed him”

MUSLIMS ON THE BIBLE

However, this attitude towards the nature of the Christian scriptures has been moderated somewhat by the attempt to find prophetic tropes that relate to Muhammad within them. Given the role of Judaism and Christianity as antecedents to the Islamic tradition, this is unsurprising.

There are two areas of interest that are commonly identified by Muslim scholars, one in the OT and one in the NT, as representing a connection to the later Islamic tradition – a passage in Deuteronomy referring to a future prophet and a reference in the NT to the figure of the ‘paraclete’.

MUSLIMS ON THE BIBLE

Muslim scholars (al-Samawal, Ali) have pointed to a reference in Deut 18:18 as referring to the oncoming prophethood of Muhammad, specifically to the Arabs. This mirrors some of the initial Christian reactions to the oncome of Islam, which sought to locate Muhammad within a specifically Arab context.

"I will raise up a prophet from among their countrymen like you, and I will put My words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him. It shall come about that whoever will not listen to My words which he shall speak in My name, I Myself will require it of him."

Deuteronomy 18:18

Similarly, a complicated passage in the Gospel of John has also been read by Muslim scholars (Ibn Hisham, Ibn Qutaybah) as prophesying the coming of Muhammad, although this interpretation has been significantly critiqued by textual scholarship

"I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever; that is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not see Him or know Him, but you know Him because He abides with you and will be in you."

John 14:16-17



CHRISTIANS ON THE QUR'AN

CHRISTIANS ON THE QUR'AN

By pure historical chronology, it is difficult to adduce Christian attitudes towards the Qur'an – the Islamic tradition, emerging later, sought to both incorporate and differentiate itself from aspects of previous belief, while the earlier traditions never had to engage in this form of alignment.

Given this, there is a lack of Christian on the Qur'an – after all, if one rejects the prophethood of Muhammad, then the contents of that prophecy are unimportant.

What we do see, are Christian responses to claims made by the Islamic tradition about the Christian scriptures, which attempt to refute them and draw responsive critiques of the Qur'an by comparison.

CHRISTIANS ON THE QUR'AN

The most prominent early example of this is Al-Kindi and his *Apology*, from around 813-833AD. We have come across Al-Kindi before in section 4 as recommended further reading. Al-Kindi sets out to refute the key claim of the Islamic tradition that, while the Qur'an is perfect and has an unimpeachable chain of transmission, the Gospels of the Christian tradition have been altered or corrupted.

He does this by retelling the traditional Islamic account of the organisation of the Qur'an – that following the Prophet Muhammad the text of the Qur'an was memorised by members of his companions, but that this community memory was threatened by the initial civil wars between various groups in the early Caliphate, include the split between Sunni and Shia.

This tradition is related through the Hadith material, which states that the final organisation of the Qur'an took place under the 3rd Caliph Uthman (ruled 644-656AD), ten to twenty years after the death of Muhammad. Once this organisation was complete:

“Uthman sent to every Muslim province one copy of what they had copied, and ordered that all the other Qur'anic materials, whether written in fragmentary manuscripts or whole copies, be burnt”
Sahih Al-Bukhari 6:510

CHRISTIANS ON THE QUR'AN

Al-Kindi uses this narrative in order to question the authenticity and reliability of the Qur'anic text produced by it. Specifically, he draws attention to the need expressed in doing it – that multiple versions were available across the Islamic community before this. He writes:

“One man, then, read one version of the Qur'an, his neighbour another, and differed. One man said to his neighbour: “My text is better than yours,” while his neighbour defended his own. So additions and losses came about and falsification of the text.”
(trans Newman, 455-459)

This pushback against the narrative of the perfection of the Qur'an reflects an understanding of the political and social divisions within the Muslim community in Uthman's time and in the time of Al-Kindi.

It is this division on which he bases his argument against the perfection of the Qur'an – both political division, over inheritance and the right to the Caliphate, and religious division, between Sunni and Shia or Asharite and Mutazilite.

CHRISTIANS ON THE QUR'AN

Al-Kindi refers back to this situation further when he writes:

“You know what happened between Ali, Abu Bakr, Umar and Uthman, how they hated each other and quarrelled and corrupted the text; how each one tried to oppose his neighbour and to refute what he (had) said. Pray, how are we to know which is the true text, and how shall we distinguish it from the false?”

(trans Newman, 455-459)

This reflects consistent Islamic critiques of the Christian Gospels on the basis of their internal contradiction and their diversity of narrative content.

Beyond Al-Kindi, we see contemporary Christian figures also engaging in this process of critique – largely centred around applying similar historical-critical methodologies to the Qur’anic text that have previously and historically been applied to the Biblical text.

CHRISTIANS ON THE QUR'AN

Staying with the context of the compilation of the Qur'an, contemporary scholar James White argues that:

"It is self-evident that no matter how stable or even primitive the Uthmanic tradition is, it is not the only stream that can claim direct connection to Muhammad and the primitive period of Qur'anic compilation. The greatest concern for any follower of Muhammad should be what he said (or what he received from the Angel Gabriel), not what an uninspired Caliph later thought he should have said."

(White, 2013, 271)

Other scholars, Christian or non-Muslim, have also engaged with the historicity of the compilation of the Qur'an with some positing a significantly later date for its bringing together (Cook, Crone), some questioning the reliability of the transmission of the text and a number of textual changes (Wansborough, Puin), and some (Nevo) arguing for a much longer period during which the tradition of Islam accreted.

SCRIPTURE — BIBLE & QURAN

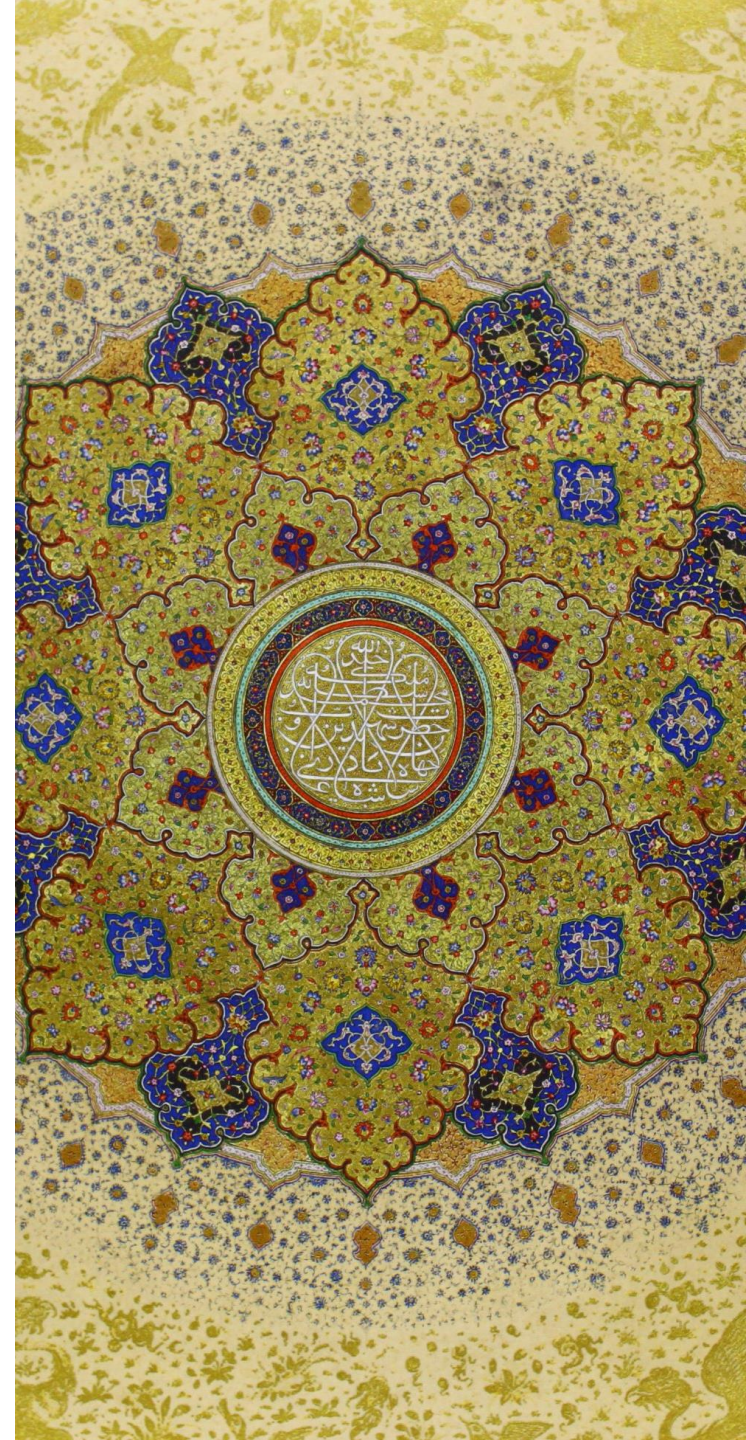
As we can hopefully see following this section, while both religious traditions orientate themselves towards sacred and religious texts, the way that these texts function within the traditions and their attitudes towards their place within other religious traditions significantly differs.

We covered here the second of three critical theological differences between the two traditions – the question of the reliability of scripture, its nature and delivery, and its relationship to other texts.

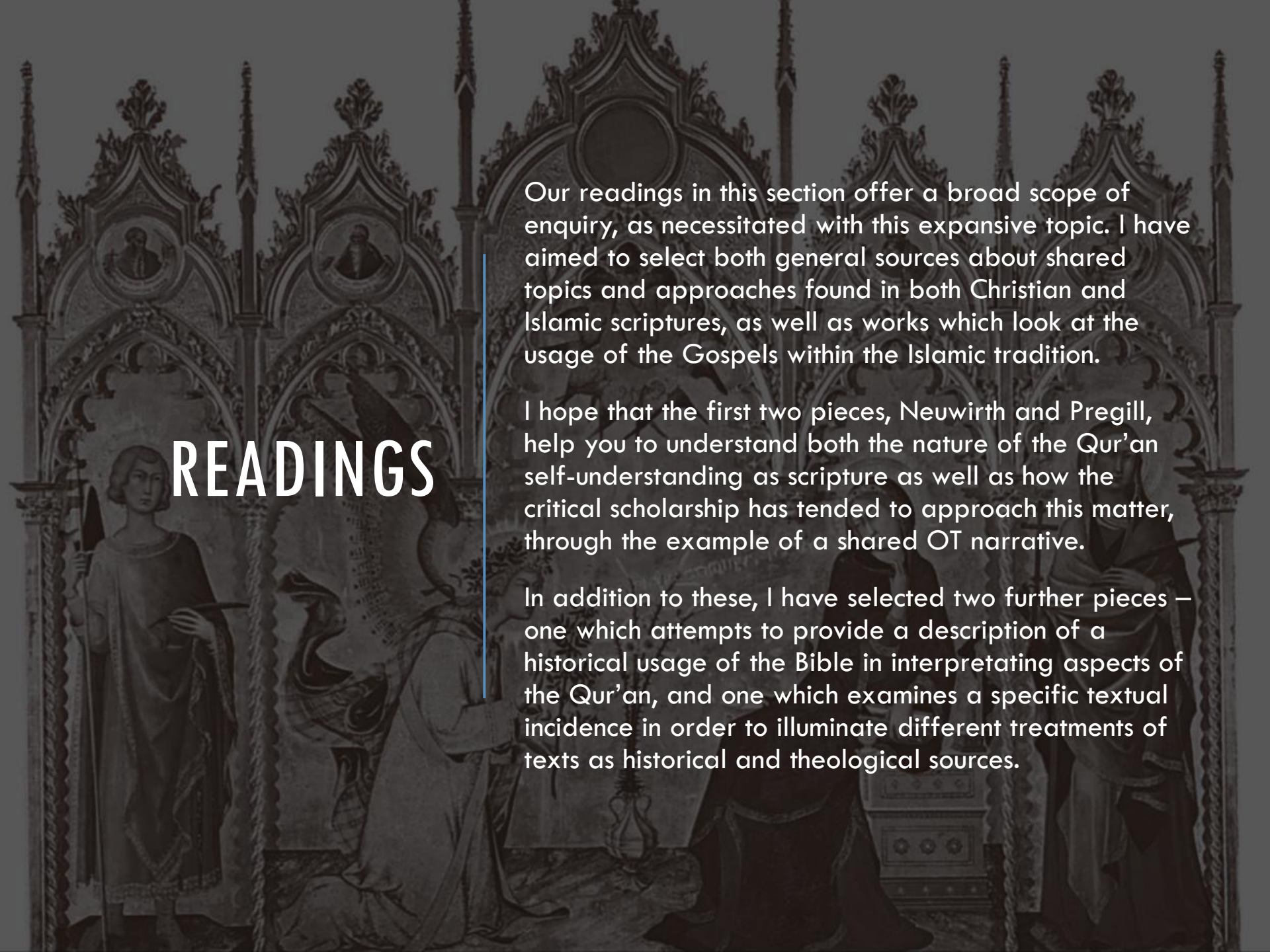
The Muslim claim for the perfection of the Qur'an, not just in message, but in physical text, necessitates a deep and difficult navigation of contradictory but earlier texts stemming from a shared root.

In addition, Christian attitudes towards the Gospels, as complex re-tellings from different perspectives of the same event, fail to map onto Muslim attitudes towards the Qur'an and open up space for the critiques of corruption and addition made.

There is great deal more to dig into when looking at the relationship between Christianity and Islam through the prism of Scripture – something we will explore over the next two sections when we examine the role shared scriptural figures in the religious traditions – Jesus / Isa & Mary / Maryam



READINGS



READINGS

Our readings in this section offer a broad scope of enquiry, as necessitated with this expansive topic. I have aimed to select both general sources about shared topics and approaches found in both Christian and Islamic scriptures, as well as works which look at the usage of the Gospels within the Islamic tradition.

I hope that the first two pieces, Neuwirth and Pregill, help you to understand both the nature of the Qur'an self-understanding as scripture as well as how the critical scholarship has tended to approach this matter, through the example of a shared OT narrative.

In addition to these, I have selected two further pieces — one which attempts to provide a description of a historical usage of the Bible in interpreting aspects of the Qur'an, and one which examines a specific textual incidence in order to illuminate different treatments of texts as historical and theological sources.

READINGS

Neuwirth, A., & Wilder, S. (2019-03-28). The Qur'an and Scripture. In *The Qur'an and Late Antiquity: A Shared Heritage*. : Oxford University Press.

Pregill, M. (2020-07-30). The Qur'anic Calf Episode Between Orientalism and Islamic Tradition. In *The Golden Calf between Bible and Qur'an: Scripture, Polemic, and Exegesis From Late Antiquity to Islam*. : Oxford University Press.

Wheeler, Brannon, Arab Prophets of the Qur'an and Bible, *Journal of Qur'anic Studies*, vol. 8, no. 2, 2006, pp. 24–57

Casewit Y. A Muslim Scholar of the Bible: Prooftexts from Genesis and Matthew in the Qur'an Commentary of Ibn Barrajān of Seville (d. 536/1141). *Journal of Qur'anic Studies*. 2016;18(1):1-48